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Treasures in a sooty bag? A note on Durham Proverb 7

Sepe in [u]ile sacculo fulget aurum.
Oft on sotigum bylige searowa licgað.[1]

'Do not judge a book by its cover' is the general sense of these two proverbs, which together make up number 7 of the Durham Proverbs (DP), a collection of forty-six Old English proverbs, accompanied by Latin versions, in Durham, Cathedral Library, B. III. 32 (Canterbury, s. xi med.), fols. 43v-45r.[2] Olof Arngart translated DP 7 as 'Often in a sooty bag treasures lie'.[3] Although his translation has been generally accepted,[4] Paul Cavill and Richard Marsden have independently argued that the Old English should be translated as something like ''Often there is cunning in a sooty bag', i.e. in someone who sits by the fire all day, an old man' on the basis of Old Norse analogues;[5] Cavill regards the Latin text, which translates as 'Often gold shines in a cheap purse', as a faulty translation of the Old English.[6] This note calls attention to a precursor of the Latin text of DP 7 in the ninth-century Collectanea Pseudo-Bedae and, in doing so, sheds some light on the unresolved relationship between the Old English and Latin versions of the DP in general and DP 7 in particular.

For the DP in general, Arngart hypothesized that the Latin is a translation of the Old English. He based this claim, primarily, on the quality of the Latin, which he qualified as 'rather imperfect and faulty'.[7] Following Arngart, Richard Marsden relates the quality of the Latin in the DP to its possible purpose of teaching Latin in medieval schools: 'The uneven and in places incomprehensible nature of the [Latin] might suggest that it was supplied by a

[1] All references to the Durham Proverbs are to O. Arngart, 'The Durham Proverbs', Speculum, 56 (1982), 288–300.
[2] For this manuscript, see N. R. Ker, Catalogue of Manuscripts Containing Anglo-Saxon (Oxford, 1957), no. 107; H. Gneuss, Handlist of Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts (Tempe, AZ, 2001), no. 244.
[3] Arngart, 'Proverbs', 296, n. 7.
[4] Cf. N.F. Barley, 'A Structural Approach to the Proverb and Maxim with Special Reference to the Anglo-Saxon Corpus', Proverbium, 20 (1972), 745; T.A. Shippey, 'Miscomprehension and Re-Interpretation in Old and Early Middle English Proverb Collections', Text und Zeittiefe, ed. H.L.C. Tristram (Tübingen, 1994), 299; P. Beekman Taylor, Sharing Story: Medieval Norse-English Literary Relationships (New York, 1998), 42.
[5] P. Cavill, Maxims in Old English Poetry (Cambridge, 1999), 28, n. 3; R. Marsden, The Cambridge Old English Reader (Cambridge, 2004), 304, n. 7.
[6] Cavill, Maxims, 28, n. 3, 74.
[7] O. Arngart, 'Durham Proverbs 17, 30, 42', Notes & Queries, n.s. 29 (1982), 201.

novice monk attempting the translation as a learning exercise'.[8] Apart from a number of imperfections in the Latin, Arngart found confirmation of his hypothesis in the retention of the Old English word for 'mead' in the Latin translation of DP 8, 'post medum maxime sitit / hwilum æfter medo. men mæst geþyrsteð' [sometimes after mead, men are most thirsty].[9] Arngart further argued that the Old English proverbs must be original, since some echo lines from early Old English poetry, such as DP 9 and 23, which recall The

Wanderer and Beowulf respectively.[10] Finally, Arngart pointed out that a number of the Old English proverbs conform to Old English metre and alliteration, as is, for example, the case for DP 7.[11]

Arngart's hypothesis has not been universally accepted for each of the DP. Marsden remarks that, while we often need to turn to the Old English to make sense of the Latin, there are nonetheless cases where the Latin clarifies the Old English, such as DP 16 and 40.[12] Moreover, eleventh-century additions in British Library, Royal 2.B.v (Winchester, s. x med.) feature the Old English and Latin versions of DP 37 and 39;[13] in both cases, as Marsden points out, the Latin text is identical to DP, whereas the Old English shows some differences:[14]

DP 37: Meliora plura quam grauia honera fiunt Betere byþ oft feðre þonne oferfeðre.[15]	Royal 2. B.v, fol. 6r: Meliora plura quam grauia honera fiunt Selre byþ oft feðre þænne oferfeðre.
DP 39: Omnis inuocans cupit audiri Ciggendra gehwilc wile þæt hine man gehere.[16]	Royal 2. B.v, fol. 6r: Omnis inuocans cupit audiri Clipiendra gehwylc wolde, þæt him man oncwæde.

Arngart proposed that correspondences between the DP and Royal 2 B.v. suggest a common source for both texts, but he ignored the variation in the Old English as opposed to the exact matching of the Latin.[17] Given the similitude of the Latin versions, it is more likely that the

[8] Marsden, Reader, p. 302; cf. Arngart, 'Proverbs 17, 30, 42', 199–201.
[9] O. Arngart, The Durham Proverbs (Lund, 1956), 6.
[10] O. Arngart, 'Durham Proverb 23, and Other Notes on Durham Proverbs', Notes & Queries, n.s. 30 (1983), 291–2.
[11] Arngart, Proverbs, 6
[12] Marsden, Reader, 302.
[13] For this manuscript, see Ker, Catalogue, no. 249; Gneuss, Handlist, no. 451.
[14] Marsden, Reader, 302. The text of Royal 2. B.v is taken from R.P. Wülcker, 'Aus englischen Bibliotheken', Anglia, 2 (1879), 373.
[15] 'Better often loaded than overloaded.'
[16] 'Every supplicant wants to be listened to.'
[17] Arngart, 'Proverbs', 289–90.

source for DP 37 and 39 was a Latin text and that the Old English is the translation. Proposing different origins for the various items of the DP is in line with a suggestion made by Tom Shippey, who summarises the state of affairs regarding the relationship between the Latin and Old English text of the DP as follows: 'The question of whether the Old English translates the Latin in this collection or vice versa has not been argued convincingly. Possibly some items were originally from one language, some from the other.'[18]

DP 7, as highlighted above, is a problematic case, because neither the Old English 'Oft on sotigum bylige searowa licgað' nor the Latin 'Sepe in [u]ile sacculo fulget aurum' can be considered a straightforward translation of the other. Arngart's translation, 'Often in a sooty bag treasures lie', is hampered by the fact that the meaning 'treasure' for Old English 'searowa' is here only inferred from the Latin 'aurum'. The principal meanings of Old English searo are 'art', 'skill' and 'cleverness' and by extension the term can be applied to objects or deeds made by art, skill or cunning, such as 'war-gear'.[19] The meaning 'treasure' could, in turn, be an extension of 'a work of art', but this meaning is not attested elsewhere for Old English searo or, indeed, for its Germanic cognates.[20] In other words, if, as Arngart suggested, the Latin is a translation of the Old English, the translator's choice of Latin 'aurum' for Old English 'searowa' is a remarkable one and much the same can be said for his other choices: 'uile' [cheap] for 'sotigum' [sooty] and 'fulget' [shines] for Old English 'licgað' [lie].

Marsden and Cavill also assume that the Latin is a translation of the Old English, but opt for a different Modern English translation. Interpreting 'searowa' with its principal meaning 'cunning', they offer the translation 'Often there is cunning in a sooty bag' and both, independently, argue that the sooty bag must be interpreted as an old man.[21] They do so on

account of Old Norse analogues, such as Hávamal 134:

at hárum þul
hlæðu aldregi
opt er gott þat er gamlir kveða
opt ór skörpum belg

[18] T.A. Shippey, '"Grim Wordplay": Folly and Wisdom in Anglo-Saxon Humour', Humour in Anglo-Saxon Literature, ed. J. Wilcox (Cambridge, 2000), 42, n. 16.
[19] J. Clark Hall, A Concise Anglo-Saxon Dictionary, 4th edn. (Cambridge, 1960), s.v. 'searo'; M. Lansfield Keller, The Anglo-Saxon Weapon Names Treated Archaeologically and Etymologically, 120–122.
[20] G. Kroonen, Etymological Dictionary of Proto-Germanic (Leiden, 2013), s.v. '*sarwa'; cf. Marsden, Reader, 304, n. 7.
[21] Cavill, Maxims, 28, n. 3; Marsden, Reader, 304, n. 7.

skilin orð koma[22]

Other Old Norse texts similarly employ the image of a bag as representing an unlikely man providing (wise) counsel, such as 'opt ór [rau]ðom belg / bǫll ráð koma' [from a bleeding bag often bold counsels come] in Hamðismál 26 and 'hafa skal góð ráð þó ór refsbelg komi' [you must have good counsel, even if it comes from a bag made of fox-skin] in Gull-Þóris saga, c. 18.[23] These Old Norse analogues convincingly make the case for translating 'searowa' in DP 7 as 'cunning'. Interpreting the sooty bag as an old man can be inferred from the Hávamal analogue and the fact that the old man's wisdom was also considered proverbial in the Old English Maxims II: 'gomol snoterost, / fyrngearum frod, se þe ær feala gebideð' [the old man [is] the wisest, old in years gone by, he who endured many things before].[24] Moreover, the Old Norse analogues strengthen Arngart's case that the Old English text of DP 7 has vernacular, Germanic roots, rather than being a translation of the Latin. Cavill suggests 'it is better to see the Latin as a bad translation of the Old English, and dispense with the 'purse' and 'treasures' ideas altogether'.[25]

The Latin 'Sepe in [u]ile sacculo fulget aurum' of DP 7, however, cannot be regarded as an impromptu mistranslation of the Old English 'Oft on sotigum bylige searowa licgað'. The Latin text of DP 7 has an exact precursor in the Collectanea, a ninth-century Latin florilegium of riddles and encyclopaedic material, which 'originated either in Ireland or England, or in an Irish foundation on the continent'.[26] The text of Collectanea no. 44 is identical to the Latin DP 7: 'Saepe enim in uili sacculo fulget aurum' [Often gold shines in a cheap purse].[27] It is unlikely that the ninth-century compiler of the Collectanea was familiar with an earlier version of the DP, as he did not include any of the other proverbs.[28] In other words, the Latin of DP 7 must have existed as an independent, Latin proverb as early as the ninth century. As such, this precursor of DP 7 in the Collectanea disproves Cavill's hypothesis that the Latin is a bad translation of the Old English; we must assume, instead, that

[22] 'At a grey-haired chanter you must never guffaw – often it is excellent, what old men say – often from a shriveled skin bag shrewd words come'. The Poetic Edda. Volume III: Mythological Poems II, ed. and trans. U. Dronke (Oxford, 2011), 29.
[23] These analogues are listed in The Poetic Edda. Volume I: Heroic Poems, ed. and trans. U. Dronke (Oxford, 1969), 237, though without reference to DP 7. Dronke's analogues are repeated by Cavill, Maxims, 28, n. 3. The Hávamal analogue was already noted by Arngart, 'Proverbs', 296, n. 7.
[24] Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems, ASPR 6, ed. E.V.K. Dobbie (London, 1942), 55–6, ll. 11b–13.
[25] Cavill, Maxims, 28, n. 3.
[26] M. Lapidge, 'The Origin of the Collectanea', Collectanea Pseudo-Bedae, eds. and trans. M. Bayles and M. Lapidge (Dublin, 1998), 12.
[27] Collectanea Pseudo-Bedae, eds. and trans. Bayles and Lapidge, 126–7.
[28] N. Wright lists Collectanea no. 44 as one of twenty-three items for which no source or analogue has been found; the DP do not feature in his overview of sources and analogues. N. Wright, 'The Sources of the Collectanea', in Collectanea Pseudo-Bedae, eds. and trans. Bayless and Lapidge, 25.

both the Old English and the Latin texts of DP 7 are original. The semantic differences between the Latin and Old English in DP 7, then, are not the result of an unskilled translator but may be the work of a collector of proverbs who paired together two, more or less similar proverbs from two collections in different tongues.

In discussing the relationship between the Latin and Old English versions of the DP, scholars must not only look at each proverb individually, but should also be wary of reducing the issue to an either-or scenario, whereby they either propose a translation from Old English to Latin, as seems to be the case for DP 7, 9 and 23, or vice versa, as may be the case for DP 16, 37 and 39. We must allow for a third option: that neither the Old English nor the Latin is a translation of the other, but that both were original, independent proverbs, stemming from different traditions and placed together because they shared a similar conceit. In the case of DP 7, the shared conceit is that of the unsightly bag, from which gold shone in the Latin tradition, but to which the

vernacular tradition, envisioning an old man, ascribed cunning.

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